

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: **TOURISM**

DATE: **APRIL 30, 2008**

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: **OTHERS PRESENT:**

SUPERVISORS TESSIER
 BELDEN
 KENNY
 SIMMES
 STRAINER

REPRESENTING THE TOURISM DEPARTMENT:

KATE JOHNSON, DIRECTOR
LINDA WOHLERS, CREATIVE DIRECTOR
LEISA GRANT, PRINCIPAL ACCOUNT CLERK

REPRESENTING SAWCHUCK BROWN ASSOCIATES:

KATE OSTERHOUT, ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

SUPERVISORS SHEEHAN
 MERLINO

HAL PAYNE, COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATIVE &
FISCAL SERVICES

JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD

SUPERVISOR CHAMPAGNE

SUPERVISOR GOODSPEED

FRANCIS O' KEEFE, COUNTY TREASURER

ROB HOSFORD, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

CHARLENE DiRESTA, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

*PLEASE SEE ATTACHED SIGN-IN SHEET FOR ALL OTHER
GUESTS PRESENT*

Mr. Tessier called the meeting of the Tourism Committee to order at 9:33 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Belden, seconded by Mr. Strainer and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the previous Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Kate Johnson, Tourism Director, who distributed copies of the agenda to the Committee members; *a copy of the agenda is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Johnson requested to amend the 2008 County budget to increase estimated revenues and appropriations in the amount of \$5,850, to reflect revenue received from coupon sales.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Belden and carried unanimously to amend the 2008 County budget, as outlined above and to forward same to the Finance Committee. *A copy of the resolution request is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Johnson requested a transfer of funds in the amount of \$350 from the

Promotion-Consumer Shows Code (A.6417481) to the Office Equipment Code (A.6417220), to cover the cost of a 15" LCD (Liquid Crystal Display) digital photo frame to display pictures at the consumer shows.

Motion was made by Mr. Strainer, seconded by Mr. Belden and carried unanimously to approve the request for a transfer of funds, as outlined above, and to refer the same to the Finance Committee. *A copy of the request for Transfer of Funds is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Johnson introduced Leisa Grant, Principal Account Clerk in the Tourism Department, who had joined their Office in February. She added that the Budget Performance Report sheets which consisted of the budget for the Tourism Department and Occupancy Tax were included in the agenda packet for the Committee's review.

Ms. Johnson noted that there had been a lot of discussion recently about the increasing cost of gas, which would more than likely effect the tourism industry. She apprised that the Assembly and the Senate would meet later in the day to discuss possible actions to counteract the increases. She added that the Tourism Department was taking proactive measures to make taking a vacation more desirable. Mr. Kenny asked if the Department was reconcentrating their efforts to advertise in the immediate area and Ms. Johnson replied affirmatively. Mr. Kenny stated that he felt the majority of the visitors this year would be from locations closer to this area. Linda Wohlers, Creative Director of the Tourism Department, said that people would take longer vacations this summer, as opposed to taking a few shorter vacations and she added that people were booking their vacations earlier, as well. Mr. Kenny asked if the percentage of people who booked their vacations via the internet was known and Ms. Johnson responded that the Department had performed a comparison of internet verses telephone that she could provide to him. Ms. Wohlers noted that people had a tendency to book directly with the lodging facility. Mrs. Simmes apprised that she had spoken with a hotel owner in the Town of Bolton and had been informed that last July the bookings had been down and the reservations for this July had increased. She noted that The Sagamore Resort had done well with booking conventions for April and May. Ms. Wohlers stated that people were trying to optimize the mileage they used when they went on vacation.

Ms. Johnson noted that a copy of the coupon sheets which had been compiled with local lodging, camping, dining and attractions was included in the agenda packet. She noted that there was \$1,300 in coupon value and added that this was the largest participation the Department had ever had with the coupons. She stated that they had lowered the price for participation in the coupon program this year from \$250 to \$150 and the press release for the coupons went out last week.

She apprised that from May through July, mid-week was downtime and added that to counteract that they had come up with a promotion called 'Mid-Week Melt-Down', which would offer special discounts to people who booked a mid-week (Sunday through Thursday) vacation. She noted that the link to the 'Mid-Week Melt-Down' discount was available on the Tourism website home page.

Ms. Johnson apprised that the 30-second television commercial was entitled 'A Mornings Drive' and emphasized the close proximity of the drive market. She added that the Department would conduct an email blast to 90,000 homes on their subscriber list on May 6, 2008, which would emphasize the coupon savings that were available on the website. She stated that copies of an article by *Traveler Vacation Guide*, that predicted the tourism industry would benefit from the tax rebate checks and an article from *The Post Star* that stated that the increased gas prices were increasing the amount of camping at State parks, were included in the agenda packets for the Committee's review. She said that according to a survey by AAA, when asked 'What do you do when the gas prices go up', the response had been 'we stay closer to home'.

Ms. Johnson noted that the 2008 consumer shows had been completed and added that there would be some changes for 2009 including some additions. She said that the Department would no longer pre-package the brochures for the displays and that the Department of Public Works would construct a new brochure display. She noted that they would bring a laptop computer to consumer shows in the future, to allow them to enter the information of people who sign up for the email blasts.

Ms. Johnson apprised that as of the end of March, the tourism inquiries were up 89% due to a successful television campaign in January. She stated that the Department had just completed the spring online whitewater rafting promotion and she added that 841 people had entered the contest and the winner had been from Brooklyn, New York.

Ms. Johnson expounded that a copy of the results from the online Winter Getaway survey had been included in the agenda packet. She noted that almost 1900 people had signed up for the contest which had 5 winners and added that 97% of those surveyed had previously visited the Lake George area. She said that the majority of those surveyed had stayed two to three nights and that more men had made the winter vacation decisions, as opposed to more women for the summer vacation. She stated that most of those surveyed had stayed within the Town or Village of Lake George and 51.7% had reported an excellent stay. She noted that 100% of those surveyed would recommend the area to others for vacation.

Ms. Johnson apprised that in addition to the press releases that were done by

Sawchuk Brown Associates, Warren County Tourism also sent out some press releases on their own. She added that press releases had been sent out on the topics of ice fishing, spring fishing, the increase in gas prices and coupon savings. She said that another press release would go out soon on the Rates, Dates & Events brochure. She stated that Warren County Tourism had received press mentions in *Yankee Magazine* and *Camping Life Magazine*; copies of which are on file with the minutes. *The Schenectady Gazette* had requested images, she continued, for their summer guide. She expounded that the Warren County Travel Guide had been submitted for the 'best travel guide' category for the Governor's Conference in May.

Ms. Johnson remarked that a Group Tour and Meeting/Convention update had been included in the agenda packet for the Committee's review. She said that a letter pertaining to the online 'Greatness Starts Here Quiz' had been sent to schools in Warren, Washington, Saratoga, Essex and Hamilton Counties. She stated that the Elvis Festival and the Festival of Trees had been nominated for awards with the American Bus Association.

Ms. Johnson thanked Chris LaFountain from the Information Technology (IT) Department for re-programing the Tourism Department's internal database.

Kate Osterhout, Account Executive for Sawchuk Brown Associates, presented a Power Point presentation on the work that had been accomplished since February; a copy of which is on file with the minutes. She noted that there had been press releases for spring getaways/whitewater rafting, the Greatness Starts Here Quiz, Mancations and Americade. She explained that mancations were vacations for the purpose of male bonding and added that the press release had not received much interest. Ms. Johnson interjected that the publications were more interested in personal stories and therefore, they were soliciting for those types of stories. Ms. Osterhout stated that pitches had been made for Americade, family reunions and low-cost family travel. She added that they had pitched a story to *The New York Times*, about a group that visited Wiawaka Holiday House each year. She said they had been working with HDTV to get a film crew to visit and do a segment on their news channel.

Ms. Osterhout apprised that they had responded to ProfNet queries on the topics of girl getaways, music in the Lake George area, treks and travels and county festivals. She noted that the pitches that were used for ProfNet queries were retained for future use and 'tweaked' to match the particular query. She expounded that they had an opportunity to post a press trip announcement on Travelwriters.com, which was a website that travel writers subscribed to. She said that four press trips were being offered in June pertaining to educational opportunities in the Lake George area. She added that all this had been a result

of the education pitch which had gone out in January. She stated that all of the travel writers who were interested were required to submit a letter of assignment, so they would be guaranteed that an article would come from each trip.

Mr. Champagne entered the meeting at 9:58 a.m.

Ms. Osterhout noted that when they sent out a pitch, there was a note at the bottom which instructed the writer to notify her if they were interested in a FAM tour. She added that several different writers had scheduled FAM tours, all of which were listed in the Power Point presentation. She stated that a list of the public relations tentative press release schedule was also included in the Power Point presentation. She said that if anyone had any ideas for press releases or pitches, they were welcome to contact her at Sawchuk Brown Associates.

Ms. Osterhout exited the meeting at 10:01 a.m.

Ms. Wohlers expounded that the main reasons people chose to vacation in this area were for the lakes and the attractions. She presented a tour of the website for the Committee members. She added that the majority of our visitors came from downstate New York. She apprised that the focus of the website was on crystal clear blue lakes and family fun. She stated that the website was the primary tool for people who were interested in a vacation to the Lake George area. She said that one of the goals of the current website was to build up the area's charter and fishing industry. She added that all the necessary information for fishing in the area was available on the website. She noted that they were inviting people to send in fishing pictures to be included on the website.

Ms. Wohlers said that camping was also highlighted on the website. She expounded that information was available on private campgrounds, RV parks, Lake George Island camping, state campgrounds and 'primitive' camping. She said that the boating landing page would also put an emphasis on the lake and added that all of the boating regulations and maps had been included. She stated that they were also requesting people to send in their boating photos to be displayed on the website.

Ms. Wohlers expounded that a new website entitled 'giggles and grins' would be up soon and would be a children's website. She displayed pictures of landing pages that would be added to the website that was not yet available. Mr. Kenny asked how long it would be until the website would be available. Ms. Johnson responded that the Tourism Department was having a problem with the IT Department and added that the summer landing pages did not go up until a week and a half ago, although some of the work had gone to the IT Department in December. She apprised that there were funds in the budget that had not yet been

billed by the IT Department and she would like to use those funds to hire an outside agency. Mr. Kenny noted that the Tourism website was time critical. Ms. Johnson said that the Warren County website was updated on a regular basis and added that the Tourism website was more critical than the Warren County website.

Mr. O' Keefe entered the meeting at 10:10 a.m.

Hal Payne, Commissioner of Administrative & Fiscal Services, said that he had spoken with Rob Metthe, Director of the IT Department, and had been informed that the Department was shorthanded.

Mr. Goodspeed entered the meeting at 10:11 a.m.

Ms. Wohlers played the recent summer television commercials that had been aired for the Committee members.

Ms. Johnson stated that there were no pending items to present to the Committee this month. Mr. Kenny asked if, now that the Glens Falls Civic Center was under new management, would it be possible to contact them and ensure that they kept their calendar of events updated. Ms. Johnson replied affirmatively and added that communication needed to be improved with the Glens Falls Civic Center. Mr. Kenny asked if a yearly recap was available of the Smith Travel Report and Ms. Johnson responded that she would research that and report back to the Committee.

Alice Grether, Director of Tourism for the City of Glens Falls, commented that a wonderful job had been done on the Tourism website; however, she added, Warren County should represent the whole County and not just Lake George. She said that the City of Glens Falls had wonderful art museums and theaters which could be highlighted for the tourists. She added that these were great rainy day options. Ms. Wohlers responded that the Travel Guide had a large focus on indoor attractions and the City of Glens Falls. She added that in the winter, indoor events were listed on the website. Ms. Grether noted that she would like to see more information available on the website that pertained to the arts and theaters in the City of Glens Falls.

Luisa Craige-Sherman, Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce, distributed a packet which had been printed from the Warren County Council of Chambers new website; a copy of which is on file with the minutes. She thanked the participating Chambers and the Supervisors from the Towns that had helped offset the cost of launching the new website. She said that the home page of the website contained a map of Warren County and the towns which had stars on the

map were current members of the Warren County Council of Chambers and had direct links to their local Chamber of Commerce websites. She stated that the Council of Chambers had working dinner meetings with guest speakers each month. She added that last months meeting had been at Ciro's Restaurant in the Town of Lake Luzerne and the guest speaker had been the Adirondack Bureau Chief for North County Public Radio, who discussed the economic challenges of living and doing business in the Adirondack Park. She noted that the next meeting would be held on May 22, 2008 at the Thousand Acres Ranch Resort in the Town of Stony Creek and the topic for discussion would be broadband and telecommunications accessability. She noted that the Warren County Council of Chambers primary focus was tourism. She thanked Supervisors Merlino, Thomas and Belden for attending the April meeting and added that the Supervisors were always invited to attend the meetings.

Richard Willmen, Colonel Williams Resort in the Town of Lake George, said that he had been an advocate of occupancy tax when it had originally been discussed in 1995. He stated that he was dissatisfied with the job that the County was doing in handling the occupancy tax. He apprised that occupancy tax, which was collected by the hotels, was fully funding the Tourism Department and he voiced his opposition to this policy. He added that none of the tax dollars from other areas of the tourism industry were being used to support the Tourism Department. Mr. Willmen expressed his concern that the Tourism Department was doing an unsatisfactory job and stated that magazine advertising was a waste of time and added that the number of people who read magazines had declined over the years. He stated that more professionalism was needed in the Tourism Department. He apprised that the tourism industry was expecting a decrease of up to 40% for 2008 and added that the Tourism Department budget should also be cut by 40%. He stated that the Department needed a program that worked and employees who were willing to work past 5:00 p.m. when necessary.

As there was no further business to come before the Tourism Committee, on motion made by Mr. Strainer and seconded by Mr. Belden, Mr. Tessier adjourned the meeting at 10:28 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Charlene DiResta, Legislative Office Specialist